

LUNCH AND LEARN GANG: “Tennessee’s Rare Native Fish”

May 1, 12-1:00 p.m.

Region II Conference Room

The barrens topminnow, a unique little fish about two and one-third inches long, was once common across Tennessee's Highland Rim and the barrens region. Faced with many challenges like the introduced predator western mosquitofish, drought, habitat fragmentation, and declining water quality, the topminnow population was squeezed into almost extinction. It was pushed into only two known locations in the wild by the 1990s and both of them were small, localized and tenuous. It was classified as a threatened species by the state of Tennessee. It was imperative that the population be strengthened!

Recovery plans were put in operation, based largely on the rearing in captivity of the topminnow.

On a rainy Tuesday morning, April 11, 2000, it was release day for a group of hatchery-reared topminnow young. I watched the men and women working on the project carry the tiny fish to the water, cradling the fish carefully in water-filled plastic bags, and ease the bags open in the water, letting them swim forth. The alternate expressions of concern and joy going across their faces told me that these were special people.

All of these young fish had been raised at the facilities of the Conservation Fisheries, Inc. (CFI), of Knoxville, Tennessee, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of aquatic biodiversity. Founded by J. R. Shute and Patrick Rakes in 1992, CFI biologists have operated the only private, nonprofit hatchery in North America that raises rare native fish. They also monitor the status of populations of rare fishes in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia with unique, non-invasive monitoring techniques for which they are widely recognized.

Our next Lunch and Learn Gang presentation will be about the rare and beautiful native fishes of the southern Appalachian region, the threats they face, and the award-winning work CFI is doing to conserve them. John Tullock, CFI Outreach Director, will show us beautiful images of these fish from streams and rivers throughout our region including high-quality underwater video. We'll see the amazing colors and interesting behavior of our native fish and hear about the threats to their survival.

This is a must-see program as CFI is only giving a limited number of free public presentations and they want very much to get the story of Tennessee's rich aquatic biodiversity out to everyone. They are hoping then that more people will be inspired to care about the natural beauty and wildlife of our region.

Hosted by the I&E Department and held on the first Thursday of each month, except July, Lunch and Learn Gang presentations are about natural resource related topics and last about 30-45 minutes, allowing time for discussion during the allotted lunch hour. If you would like to make a presentation, if you have topics of personal interest you would like us to address, or if you know someone who offers an interesting program, contact Patricia Miller at (615) 781-5276 or by e-mail:

Patricia.Miller@state.tn.us.